



Good evening Senators Osten, Winfield & Miner, Representatives Walker, Candelaria & Pavalock-D'Amato, and members of the Committee. Safe Futures provides life-saving services to victims of domestic violence in Southeastern Connecticut. Services include counseling, support groups, safety planning, court-based advocacy, transportation, assistance with securing basic needs and job training, and coordination with local law enforcement, among others.

We thank Governor Lamont for his proposal to allocate **\$14,865,300 in FY23 from the Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund (CSFRF) to the Judicial Branch to offset anticipated reductions in federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grants to victim service organizations** and urge your support. It is our understanding that this amount includes \$3,772,000 for CCADV and its 18 member organizations, including Safe Futures for FY23. The Governor's proposal is clear that the final amount of funding allocated will be contingent on the final amount of reduced federal funding to the state.

As way of background, VOCA is funded through the fines and fees generated by federal prosecution, largely of white collar crime. The VOCA Fund does not contain any tax-payer dollars. The previous federal administration relied more heavily on the use of deferred prosecution and unfortunately federal law directed fines and fees from that type of prosecution to the General Treasury as opposed to the VOCA Fund. The federal VOCA Fix Act was signed into law this past summer ensuring that, moving forward, all fines and fees from deferred prosecution will be deposited into VOCA. However, due to several years of reduced deposits prior to the fix, the VOCA Fund has largely been drawn down resulting in an anticipated 50% reduction in victim assistance grants for the next two fiscal years to all states, including Connecticut, until the Fund can be replenished.

VOCA is a substantial funding source for our work to support domestic violence survivors. A 50% reduction in funding would devastate our ability to meet the growing needs of survivors. At Safe Futures, VOCA funding supports 6 full-time and 2 part-time advocates who serve nearly 3,000 victims annually. These services include criminal and civil court advocacy, law enforcement advocacy, and domestic violence counseling.

As a victim of crime in the state of CT, you are guaranteed to a set of rights throughout the criminal court process. With a 50% cut to VOCA funding, the guarantee to those rights would be significantly impacted. As a victim of crime in the state of CT, you are guaranteed to a set of rights throughout the criminal court

process. With a 50% cut to VOCA funding, the guarantee to those rights would be significantly impacted. In New London, 37% of the criminal docket is domestic violence cases and, due to the pandemic, that number is growing exponentially. With a regular increase in cases and, consequently, victims, the demand for victim advocacy, a support system in the court, and a point of contact to ensure victims' rights are being upheld has also grown.

The quality and frequency of victim contact would also decrease. With the assistance of a victim advocate, the state has been able to establish better patterns of incorporating victim input into the decision-making process for the resolution of domestic violence cases. Family Violence Victim Advocates are also an essential and confidential component to the court process. We offer more comprehensive safety planning for victims in extremely dangerous situations because we have a better understanding of the safety risks involved with an offender undergoing the legal process. I can give you an example: Countless times, we have had to make the terrifying phone call to a victim to be the first to notify them of their offender's anticipated bonding out of incarceration. Not only is no other office in the court able to maintain confidentiality to then get that victim to a safe location unbeknownst to the offender, but also, no other advocates in our agency have relationships in the court where they would even have access to that critical information.

A cut to funding would also perpetuate victim silencing, as a defendant has the support and guidance of Family Relations and/or attorneys throughout the process, and the victim would essentially have no one to assist them from arraignment to adjudication: a process which can sometimes take years. The court process is overwhelming enough as it is, nevermind having to navigate the system with little to no assistance. That's all I have; thank you for your time and consideration of this matter.

We know that the VOCA funding gap is not a problem that was created by this or any other state government. Connecticut's Governor and General Assembly have been a model for supporting a strong response to domestic violence and we thank you for your continued leadership. Providing temporary, one-time state funding to address this federal funding issue will help ensure that our domestic violence service system can meet the ongoing needs of survivors without interruption.

We understand that the budget adjustments before you are specific to fiscal year 2023. It is important to note that the federal government anticipates the federal VOCA funding reduction will be present for both fiscal years 2023 and 2024. **To the extent that CSFRF funds are available beyond FY23, we respectfully request that the Appropriations Committee allocate those funds to cover the VOCA funding gap for both FY23 and FY24. For CCADV and its 18 member organizations, including Safe Futures, that would mean a total of \$7,544,000 (\$3,772,000 in each of FY23 and FY24).**

Thank you for your consideration.

Shauna Harrington

Court Support & Lethality Assessment Program Coordinator